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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001868

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR GEORGIA MONITORING GROUP AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/08/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: RUSSIAN FORCES WITHDRAW

REF: TBILISI 1847

Classified By: DCM KENT LOGSDON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Multiple sources confirm Russian forces withdrew from nearly all remaining posts on undisputed Georgian territory on October 8, two days before the deadline. Russian military and local Georgian officials signed documents transferring the points outside Abkhazia back to Georgia; Russian officials sought to sign similar documents with EUMM monitors for the points outside South Ossetia, but the EUMM refused. Both uniformed and special forces of the Georgian Interior Ministry began moving into the areas abandoned by the Russians; they will reportedly establish ten offices in the areas adjacent to South Ossetia, where they had two before the conflict. As Georgian forces approach the administrative boundary of South Ossetia, all eyes will be on how they manage to maintain order with Ossetian forces nearby. The EUMM hopes to facilitate communication between the Georgians and the Ossetians through this process. Akhalkgori remains an area of particular concern. There is real potential for misunderstanding among various parties about the EUMM's proper role in ensuring security. End summary and comment.

RUSSIANS DEPART

¶2. (C) EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM). OSCE and UNOMIG sources confirmed that Russian forces withdrew from nearly all the remaining posts in undisputed Georgian territory October 8. Outside Abkhazia only one post remains, near Pakhulani. UNOMIG understood this post to be outside the Abkhaz administrative boundary, but Russian forces at the post said it was inside Abkhazia and they would not be leaving. UNOMIG noted to the Embassy, however, that Colonel Rogozin, commander of Russian forces in western Georgia, had included Pakhulani in the list of posts to be abandoned. The Pakhulani checkpoint is just south of the Enguri Dam, but does not control access to the dam, because other roads also lead there.

¶3. (SBU) EUMM and OSCE sources confirmed that, as of 1600 on October 8, the Russian withdrawal from the areas adjacent to South Ossetia was nearly complete, with the few remaining Russian forces expected to leave shortly, including a few forces waiting for a truck to pick up a loaded container at the Natsreti/Shavshvebi post.

¶4. (C) EUMM sources told the Embassy that in western Georgia, Russian officials signed documents with low-level local Georgian officials transferring authority over the posts back to Georgia. The Russian side asked EUMM monitors to sign the documents as witnesses, but the monitors refused. Georgian officials suggested to the EUMM that the documents had no legal weight, because the Georgian officials who signed them

had no authority to do so. The EUMM also noted that, although the Russian officials affixed an official stamp to the documents, the Georgians did not, further limiting any legal significance. Outside South Ossetia, Russian officials asked EUMM monitors to be the primary signatories on the same documents, suggesting that the EUMM would be responsible for securing the posts upon the Russians' departure; the EUMM refused.

#### GEORGIANS MOVE IN

15. (C) All monitoring organizations likewise confirmed that, as the Russian forces departed, Georgian Interior Ministry forces moved into the area. The size of the Interior forces moving in varied widely, from one or two officers to several vehicles full. The Interior Ministry informed post the composition of the forces included both uniformed and special forces. The Deputy Head of the EUMM, Gilles Janvier, told PolOff that the Georgians intended eventually to establish ten permanent offices in the areas abandoned by the Russians, although they had only had two in the region before the conflict.

#### WHO'S IN CHARGE?

16. (C) As noted in reftel, the Russian departure will place Georgian forces next to large sections of Ossetian-controlled areas for the first time since the August conflict. Considering the multiple incidents of violence in recent weeks, there is a real danger of such incidents continuing. All sides seem to recognize this danger. By seeking direct EUMM involvement in the transfer of the posts outside South

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Ossetia, the Russians seem to be seeking a binding commitment from the EUMM -- a civilian, unarmed mission -- to be directly involved in providing security. Janvier explained to PolOff that the EUMM's responsibility is not to provide security directly, but to monitor the provision of security by the appropriate authorities. Head of the EUMM Hansjorg Haber explained to PolOffs in a separate meeting that the EUMM is interested in facilitating communication between Georgian and de facto interior forces in hopes of improving coordination. The Georgians themselves seemed to Haber to be receptive to such coordination; they seemed unconcerned about whether such contact would confer legitimacy on de facto officials. Haber thought the South Ossetians would be the ones to refuse such contact.

17. (C) In discussions earlier in the week, the Russians asked Haber to sign two memoranda of understanding (MOU) after their withdrawal was complete. One would limit the presence of Georgian armed troops in the areas abandoned by the Russians, and one would certify that Russia has met its obligation to pull back to pre-war positions and that the EUMM would not seek country-wide Georgia access (including Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Haber explained that the EUMM would of course refuse to sign such documents. He noted that the first proposed MOU sought to blur the distinction between Georgian interior and military troops and thereby limit the extent to which police units could be deployed.

17. (C) In response to Russian concerns about the Georgian Interior Ministry's weapons, Haber inspected the Gori police station and its weapons, coming away convinced that they were appropriate. He suggested that the biggest threat came from Ossetian irregulars; a member of his staff thought there were 50 or 60 troublemakers that would continue to try to provoke the Georgians, and he thought it would be difficult for the Georgians not to respond.

#### AKHALGORI -- STILL A CONCERN

18. (C) Haber suggested the Georgians harbor unreasonably high hopes for the disposition of Akhalgori. They indicated to him that they expected the Russians would return the area to

Georgian control, but he thought the Russians would hold onto Akhagori as a bargaining chip for some time. He noted, however, that the Russians will have a difficult time supporting Akhagori logistically. There is currently only one cumbersome dirt road leading to Akhagori from Tshkhinvali that does not cross into undisputed Georgian territory. It will be impassable in winter, and supplying the area will therefore be very difficult from within South Ossetia.

COMMENT: PROVOCATIONS POSSIBLE, BUT CONFUSION AS WELL

19. (C) An OSCE military monitor suggested to PolOffs that the EUMM's mission was to provide security. Haber's reports of his conversations with the Russians, along with their request for EUMM certification of various arrangements, suggest the Russians believe so as well. Janvier took pains to clarify that the EUMM was very much a monitoring mission; that it would not be providing security directly, but taking steps to monitor the provision of security by the appropriate authorities. The different interpretations of the EUMM's role seem to hinge on different readings of point 2 of the September 8 Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement, which calls for European Union "observers" to replace Russian "peacekeeping forces." In the coming days and weeks, as the potential for provocations increases, all the monitoring missions will play an important role in tracking the situation, but it will be up to the actual authorities on the ground -- be they legitimate or de facto -- to take whatever steps are necessary and appropriate. We will encourage the Georgian authorities to show restraint in those decisions, and we will have to look to the Russians to do the same on the Ossetian side, but we must beware of the potential argument that the EUMM is not taking sufficiently active steps to provide security itself.

TEFFT